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More bite for the watchdog

The Senate's "watchdog" subcommittee on the Central Intelligence Agency acquired a little more bite this week with the addition of Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and two members of the foreign relations committee, Sens. J. W. Fulbright and Bourke B. Hickenlooper.

The action of subcommittee chairman Richard B. Russell in enlarging the committee goes a considerable way toward meeting the demands of senators who sought energetically but vainly last year to have the committee reconstituted formally and enlarged to include three members of the foreign relations panel. The committee formerly was composed of seven members chosen from the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees. Critics charged the "watchdog" had little bark and no bite.

Mr. Russell's informal and unilateral decision to enlarge the committee does not go far enough, however. It appears to leave the size and composition of the committee up to the whim of its chairman. As Senator Eugene McCarthy, a leading proponent of reform in C.I.A. oversight, has observed,

"There remains . . . a question of whether this can be given and taken away." The Senate itself ought to establish on a permanent basis the new size and composition of this committee.

In addition, serious consideration should be given to another proposal made last year by Senator McCarthy, backed by Senator Pell, for a "full and complete study" of C.I.A. operations as they affect U.S. foreign policy. Such a review has not been made since C.I.A. was established by the National Security Act of 1947 and further strengthened by the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, although the agency has grown in size and expanded the scope of its operations beyond anything imagined when it was created. President Truman, who first called for the establishment of a central intelligence body, criticized C.I.A.'s "cloak and dagger" operations several years ago and declared: "I think it has become necessary to take another look at the purpose and operations of our Central Intelligence Agency."

This is a responsibility Congress should no longer shirk.

MORI/CDF